WHALERS and WHALING

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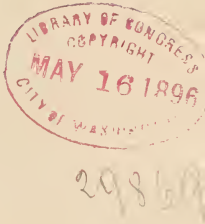
"DOWN AT THE WHARVES."

WHALERS AND WHALING.

BY

NANNIE BELLE MAURY.



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WHARF SCENE NEW BEDFORD.—WHALER JUST ARRIVED.

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WHALERS AND WHALING.

Down at the wharves of New Bedford, Massachusetts, there is a collection of the queerest looking old ships, which instantly attract your notice. So quaint, and so entirely unlike any craft one sees afloat nowadays, that you know in a minute they must be the old Whalers that used to make such perilous voyages, and have such thrilling adventures fifty years ago.

There they lie,—these old heroes,—huddled together in a group, as though to keep each other company and talk over the days of their youth, when they were the pride and glory of New Bedford, and famous all over the world. Impudent modern steamboats and

tugs bustle in and out close by, making them look still more weather beaten and deserted by comparison. You can't help feeling that they must be sensitive and unhappy at being put on the retired list, and clean forgotten in spite of the fierce battles they have fought with the winds and waves, and the fame they have won for their native City, which owes chiefly to them the wealth and prosperity she enjoys today.

They are not large vessels. The largest does not measure more than 125 feet long, and the bows are ornamented with curious, battered old figure heads, like those you read about in tales of the sea. The stern is cut as square and straight as the end of a house, and the masts, which were painted white originally, have turned a sort of hoary grey, and have bits of rigging still clinging to them and waving forlornly in the breeze, like an old man's thin wisps of hair. The copper sheathing of the sides and bottoms has been torn

AN OLD FIGURE HEAD.

off most of them, leaving exposed the rotting wood underneath, all marked and seared by the nails which pierced it, and of a vivid green color, saturated through and through with the copper from the constant action of the salt water upon it. The New Bedford people cut this wood off and sell it at a high price, for it makes a wonderfully beautiful fire, and is much in demand.

Late in the evening when your oak logs have burned themselves down to a glowing bed of embers, is the time to throw on a few sticks of drift wood — as they call it. Instantly, lovely blue, green and violet tongues of flame spring out as if by magic, popping up, now here, now there, and dancing like little sprites conjured out of the old storm-beaten wood to tell of years of toil and danger, of long voyages round Cape Horn and in tropic seas, of weary winters, locked in the Arctic ice, and of all manner of strange experiences which lent a hand in preparing this mysterious, iridescent fire on your hearth.

The hulls of some of these old Whalers are painted in imitation of a man-of-war, with square black spaces on a white ground which, at a distance give exactly the effect of the ports where the guns poke through. This was done as a protection in time of war, so that other vessels would be shy of attacking them.

The whaling industry received a terrible blow from the discovery of petroleum which has taken the place of whale oil in Commerce, the latter being now used only for lubricating purposes. On the New Bedford wharves today there are barrels and barrels of it waiting for a favorable market, carefully protected from the weather by masses of dried seaweed packed closely around them, very much as they pack excelsior around china.

Whaling is kept up nowadays on account of the bone, which commands very high prices as it becomes more and more scarce. (It is worth three dollars per pound, and has gone as high as six.) No-

"THE STERN IS CUT AS SQUARE AS THE END OF A HOUSE."

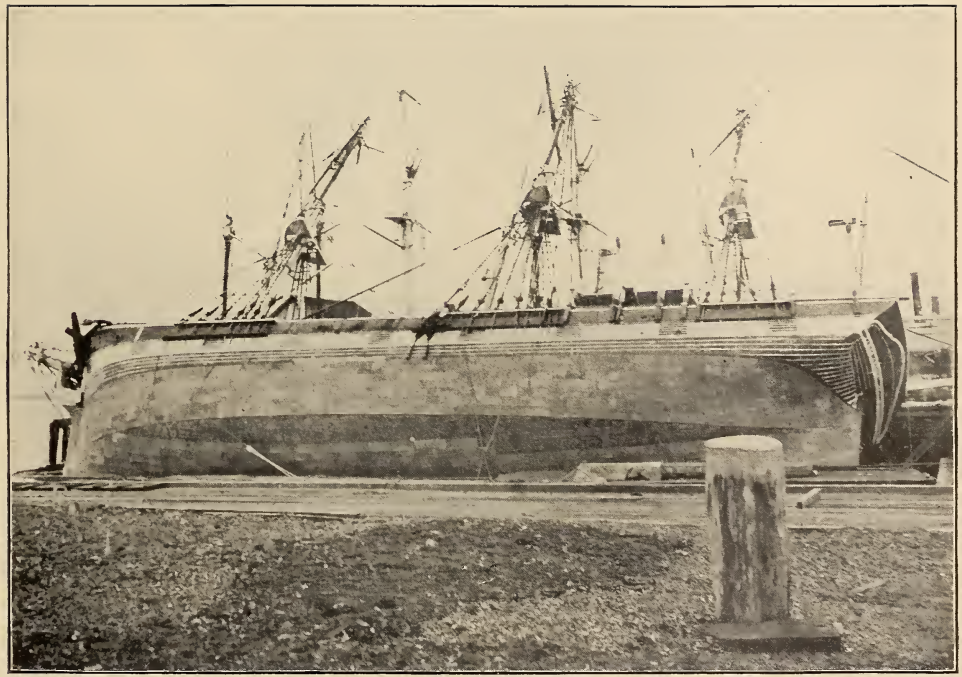
body has been able to find or invent anything to take its place, so the whalemen still make three year voyages around Cape Horn and up to the frozen Arctic Seas, risking their lives for the sake of the ladies who would never look so slim-waisted and so trim were it not for their courage and endurance.

When I arrived at New Bedford the other day, two Whalers had just come in. The Canton, from Hudson Bay where she spent a year and a half, and had all her Copper sheathing torn off by the ice she cut her way through, and the "James Arnold," from a voyage of two years and a half around Cape Horn. This last one is a famous old Whaler, a hero of many voyages, and is known as a "Friday Ship," because, in defiance of time honored superstition, she was launched on Friday, started on her first voyage on Friday, and completed her record by capturing her first whale on the same unlucky day.

A few days later, a bark came sailing up Buzzards Bay, and

proved to be still another whaler, which dropped anchor right along side her battered comrades at New Bedford. The wharf was all bustle and excitement as the crew came ashore in the fur coats and caps they had worn in the Arctic regions, and eagerly scanned the assembled crowd for the faces of parents and friends. One poor fellow looked solemn and forlorn, although he was met by his mother, for he was sick with scurvy, and had to be taken home in a carriage. And mighty lucky he was to be landed in his own town instead of some port hundreds of miles away, where there was nobody to care for and look after him.

The crew numbered twenty-four men, all told. They had been away a year and a half, and spent all the winter before hemmed in by the ice of Hudson Bay, where they were constantly tantalized by seeing hundreds of whales, but could only capture three on account of the ice. The young boat steerer who told me with pride that he had harpooned and taken



SHIP JAMES ARNOLD HOVE DOWN FOR REPAIRS.

two out of the three, said it was simply maddening to see them in such numbers, and not be able to get at them. He was a fresh faced, blue eyed, sandy haired Scotchman, ruddy and strong, and looked as if he thoroughly enjoyed his life of hardship and danger, as he eagerly showed us the very harpoon he had hurled into one of his whales, and the lance — sharp and keen as a razor — which had pierced its vitals. "It went in up to there," said he, pointing to a bent place about half way up the iron handle.

"Why does the boat steerer always throw the harpoon?" I asked him. "The officer in the bow does the killing, why doesn't he throw the harpoon too?" The young Scotchman threw back his head and laughed. "They wouldn't trust a man to steer the boat close enough to the whale unless he had to throw the harpoon," said he; "you see, he's got to steer right up to her to get it in. If he didn't have to do that he might lose his nerve and sheer off too soon if he got scared."

It brought the whole thing very vividly before one, to talk to

this stalwart young sailor who had been through it all himself so recently. This was his first voyage as a boat steerer, so he was more than willing to answer my eager questions, and explained lots of things I had always wanted to know. For instance, why the whale boats are steered with one oar instead of a rudder, as is invariably the case in the pictures in the geography. He told me that a boat could be suddenly sheered around and managed much quicker when steered by the oar, because she must have a certain amount of forward motion, "steerage way,"—as they call it—before she can answer to a rudder. Also why a whaleship carries three of her boats on one side and only one on the other, which doesn't look shipshape and trim. "They have to leave space for a whale to be hauled alongside and cut in," explained this most typical jolly tar, who was kept in a perpetual grin at my amusing ignorance.

What a strange sensation it must be to come back from one

OIL STORED WAITING A FAVORABLE MARKET.

of these long voyages,— three or four years they lasted in old times— not knowing whether your nearest and dearest are alive or dead, or what other changes may have befallen. One of the sailors of this very Whaler was met by the news that his father had died last summer.

And that reminds me of the story of a young fellow who was obliged to sail from New Bedford on the day his mother was buried. Everybody felt so sorry for him and his poor old father left alone in his sorrow. Three years later the son returned and was met on the wharf by the old man who gave him a hearty slap on the back, and said jovially, "welcome home lad, come up to the house and let me introduce you to your mother."

It is all very fine and poetical to talk about a "life on the ocean wave," and the "jolly tar," and that sort of thing, but none of us have the least idea of a whaleman's real life, and its dreadful hardships, until we go on board a whaler just in from a voyage. In the

first place the whole vessel is reeking with oil and dirt. *Must* be, unless the voyage has been a failure. The penetrating smell is already in your nostrils before you step on board. Little streams of oil trickle sluggishly down the deck. The rigging is soaked with it, the gangways are slippery with it, the very air seems saturated with fishy oil. This particular Whaler was a small one, about ninety feet long, and her cabin and sleeping accommodations were a revelation not to be forgotten. We entered a miniature saloon with a folding table in the centre, and dingy casters overhanging it. This was where the officers took their meals, and here, as everywhere, the atmosphere of oil prevailed. Opening into this dining-room, and occupying the extreme end of the ship, was the captain's cabin, about the same size as the saloon, or even smaller. (Seven feet by eight, by actual measurement.) A venerable old horse hair sofa with its hind legs sawed off, to make it fit the sloping wall, was firmly lashed across the square stern, it's

"A VENERABLE HORSE HAIR SOFA."

length being the exact width of the apartment. One chair, and a rusty stove completed the furniture. These two cabins were flanked on either side by the sleeping quarters of the Captain and his Mates. Dark, bad smelling cupboards with two wooden shelves one above the other for bunks. They were in every way suitable accommodations for the rats and roaches we were told to look out for.

When I realized that these were the swell apartments, so to speak, I began to wonder what sort of a place the sailors slept in, and wondered still more a few minutes later when I was invited to descend a ladder into a black hole in the bow of the ship, from which arose an indescribable odor, that made one's stomach quail.

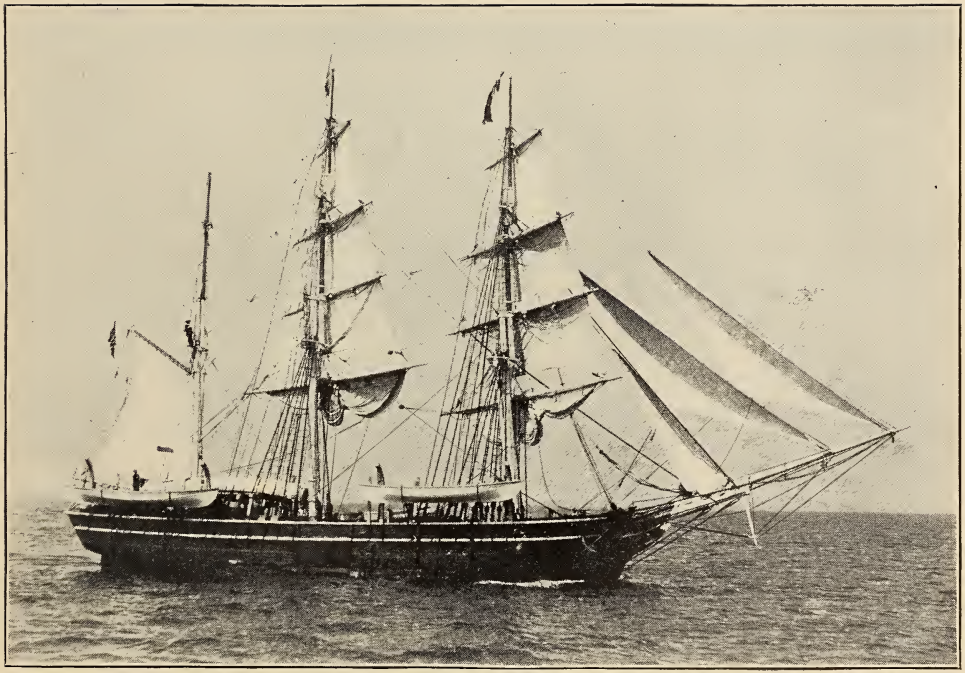
"I wouldn't advise you to come down," said a sailor at the bottom of the ladder, who had been packing his sea chest to go ashore, and I took his advice, and stood peering down into the darkness with my handkerchief to my nose, trying to imagine what it must be like,

to sleep in such a fearful place. No light, no air, except through the tiny hatchway which is often fastened down in rough weather. Fourteen men packed together there like sardines every night for a year and a half.

The views of the cabin and forecastle of this whaler were taken by an enterprising photographer, who even descended into the fearsome black hole above mentioned, with his camera, and took a very successful flash light picture of the sailors' bunks.

It doesn't seem likely that a man would ever adopt whaling as a profession if he were initiated at first into this state of affairs. But a whaler just starting on a voyage, is as spick and span as fresh paint and hard scrubbing can make her, so the green hands come to it by degrees, and since prosperity means dirt to a whaleman, he soon gets used to it.

It takes about thirty thousand dollars to fit out a whaler for a



BARK PLATINA STARTING ON A THREE YEARS CRUISE.

long voyage. Every emergency must be anticipated and provided for, and the stores and provisions stowed away with a lavish hand, for who knows how long the good ship may be cut off from fresh supplies? So into the hold go one hundred and fifty barrels of salt beef, seventy-five barrels of salt pork, thirty barrels of flour made up in bread, twenty barrels of uncooked flour, three hundred gallons of molasses, two hundred pounds of coffee, five hundred pounds of sugar, and corresponding quantities of meal, rice, beans, dried apples, butter, cheese, ham, codfish, tea, raisins, vinegar, sperm candles, fresh water, oak and pine wood, staves, heading and iron hoops for barrels, rivets, sheathing, copper and yellow metal, sheath nails, coppering nails, tar, cordage boat boards, pine boards, flags, bricks, lime, canvas, cotton twine, cotton cloth, tobacco, white lead, linseed oil, paint, liquors, gun powder, and Heaven knows what besides.

And here let me say, before I forget it, that the crews of these

Whalers are not paid wages as on ordinary vessels. From the Captain down, each man has his "lay," which means a certain percentage of the amount of oil and whale bone taken during the voyage. The Captain's lay, for instance, is generally about one barrel of oil to every fourteen taken. The first mate's lay is about one in twenty-four, the second mate's one in thirty, and so on, according to rank, the figures varying with the state of the market and the size of the ship. Of course the men are not paid actual oil and whale bone, but in the amount of money represented by their share of the cargo.

The average Whaler has a crew of about thirty men, selected with the greatest care, for on their skill and endurance, the success of the voyage depends. The Captain must be a man of long experience and tried ability, with a little knowledge of medicine and surgery thrown in, so that he may care for the poor fellows who have a leg or an arm torn off, and their bodies horribly lacerated by the

THE DECK OF A WHALER JUST ARRIVED.

cruel teeth of a whale. Then there are three or four mates, also men of great experience and courage, and qualified to take command if anything should happen to the Captain. Next in rank are the boat steerers. Brave hardy seamen, they must have proved themselves before they can be trusted to do their perilous work. Stout of heart and quick of hand, to elude the awful death which constantly threatens them. Then the steward and cook, the cooper, who is also a jack of all trades and can turn his hand to anything, and the sailors, who are graded as seamen, ordinary seamen, and green hands.

Poor green-hand! He little knows what is in store for him when he enlists for his first voyage, and steps aboard with smiling face and beating heart to begin a career which promises something so much more thrilling and fascinating than the uneventful, dull routine of his life at home. The first damper on his enthusiasm is probably when he is conducted to the forecastle, and follows his little sea

chest down into the stuffy black hole where he is destined to sleep cheek by jowl with a mighty queer assortment of humanity. Foreign sailors, negro sailors, men of all types and tempers, and all degrees of badness,—and perhaps goodness, too. The young green hand needs all his father's teaching and his mother's prayers to keep him untainted in such an atmosphere. What else will save him from drinking and swearing as his comrades do?

They tell a story in New Bedford about a green hand who was so bad and so smart that the fame of him still lives. He became utterly demoralized during his first voyage and was forever getting into scrapes, but by his cleverness and quickness he managed to escape many a well deserved flogging by saying witty things that made the Captain laugh and put him in a good humor. One day the young sinner was sentenced to the cat o' nine tails and agreed to submit quietly to his punishment if they would only let him speak to the

WHARF SCENE SHOWING BARRELS OF OIL.

Captain first, (it seems that the Captain had a mortal aversion to cats and couldn't bear the sight of one,) and the boy when brought before him had a wicked twinkle in his eye as he said demurely:

"A cat, I am told
In abhorrence you hold;
Your honor's aversion is mine.
If a cat with *one* tail
Makes your stout heart quail
Oh! save *me* from one that has nine."

His wit saved him.

The first night of a voyage all hands are called aft to tell off the watches and select the boat crews, and the Captain reads aloud the rules and regulations to be observed aboard ship. On the first calm day the boats are lowered and the green hands taught their places and trained at the oars. Each boat has a crew of six, the boat-

steerer, four oarsmen, and one of the mates in command. As the ship nears her cruising ground, one or more of the sailors are sent up aloft to look out for whales, and any old seaman will tell you that they often fall asleep up there. It sounds a good deal like a sailor's yarn to a land lubber, standing on deck and gazing up at the dizzy height where, fastened horizontally in the rigging are several iron rings, about the size of barrel hoops, through one of which the jolly tar slips his body, so that the ring comes just under his arms like a circular life preserver, as indeed in a way, it is, while his feet rest on a sort of little perch, which is only a piece of board lashed securely to the rigging. There he sways to and fro, like a bird on a perch, as the ship rolls and pitches, and there,—they tell us—he falls asleep. Believe it if you can.

Presently he sings out, "there she blows!" and instantly the whole ship is in a commotion. "Where away?" is the cry from the

OLD WHALER PROGRESS ON THE WAY TO THE WORLD'S FAIR.

deck. "Two points on the weather bow." "Keep your eye on her," shouts the Captain, "sing out when we head her right." As soon as the vessel is near enough to the prize the Captain gives the order to "stand by, and lower the boats." Sometimes two or three will go for one whale, and often there is a most exciting race between two boats belonging to different ships, for the one that first gets a harpoon in, and makes fast to the whale, claims the prize. Off they go, these brave fellows, rowing with all their might and main towards the monster spouting in the distance, who with one whisk of his enormous tail can send them all to Kingdom Come.

The boatheader watches his chance as they draw near, and hurls the barbed harpoon, which has a small but very strong rope attached. The head of the weapon turns as it enters the whale's side, and fastens itself there the moment the rope is pulled taut, and in this way the boat is made fast to the whale. The mate in

command — who now takes his position in the bow — drives his lance in, and as its keen edge pierces the creature's vitals, and he begins to struggle, the mate shouts at the top of his voice "Stern all! Stern all! for your lives!"

But a whale takes a lot of killing, and the lance does not always strike into his vitals. Even the explosive bombs which they fire into him nowadays have to be repeated sometimes over and over again before the creature dies. When he begins to spout blood instead of water, they know a vital part has been struck, and his dying agonies commence. Sometimes he darts away furiously, tearing through the water like an express train with the little boat spinning along behind him at such tremendous speed that they often have to cut loose to keep from being swamped. Sometimes he spins round and round, lashing the sea into seething white foam and upsetting a boat or splintering it into kindling wood if it comes within reach of him, or

SPERM WHALING.—THE CHASE.

even biting it right in two with his terrible jaws. Or perhaps he suddenly dives down into the depths of the ocean, making the harpoon rope whizz over the bow of the boat at such a rate that they have to keep pouring water over it to prevent the friction from setting the wood afire. As an old seaman once remarked to a green hand, (who had just been witnessing these stupendous convulsions for the first time,) "Whales has feelings as well as anybody. They don't like to be stuck in the gizzards and hauled along side, and cut in, and tried out, in them 'ere boilers, no more than I do."

As soon as the whale is dead, he is hauled to the side of the ship and secured there by chains. The carcass often measures more than two-thirds of the vessel's length. No more sleep for the sailors, nor rest for the weary until the "cutting in" and "trying out" are accomplished, and the oil and whalebone safely stowed away in the hold. The blubber — or fat — which surrounds the whale's body is about

a foot thick, and full of oil. The men cut it in huge unbroken strips, into which blubber hooks — as they call them — are fastened.

The sailors at the windlass aboard ship, now begin to hoist, and the huge strip peels off as the carcass rolls over and over. As soon as a piece — reaching sometimes nearly as high as the lower mast head — is got over the deck, it is severed from the body with big knives, and cut in small pieces which are thrown into the big iron "try pots" set in a sort of square brick furnace on the forward part of the deck.

To have a steady fire going day and night on wooden decks streaming with oil, and with tar covered rigging and cordage on every side, is a pretty ticklish business. Underneath the try works is a tank of water called a "pen," which is watched with increasing care, for if it should spring aleak and run dry, the ship would be enveloped in flames in five minutes. Strange to say, this ever threatening dan-

SPERM WHALING.—THE CAPTURE.

ger seems to be the one which least often overtakes whalemen.

And now the tidy ship is in a state of messiness and filth beyond words to describe. The men are soaked with odorous oil from head to foot, and their faces are so smeared with black from the smoke of the try works, that you can't tell a negro from a white man. The sails are black, the rigging is black, everything reeks with fishy oil, and if a man is a genuine whaleman — and has a cast iron stomach — he loves it and glories in it.

All this time the ship is surrounded by flocks of sea gulls, petrels, and magnificent swanlike albatrosses, screaming and fighting each other for fragments of the feast, which they devour with a voracious greed that seems altogether out of keeping with such beautiful, graceful creatures. (Like a pretty woman eating too eagerly.) They say these birds flock from far and near, no matter if the carcass be a thousand miles from land.

Whales vary in size, of course, but they are often sixty and seventy feet long. Some of those of the northwest yield two hundred barrels of oil apiece. The huge tongue is a mass of white fat, and the sailors say it looks like a great white satin cushion A single tongue has been known to yield twenty-five barrels of oil.

To the uninitiated, the whale's anatomy seems ridiculously out of proportion. Here is a monster with a tongue weighing fifteen hundred or a thousand pounds, and an ear so small that the opening will hardly admit a knitting needle, while its eyes are no larger than those of a cow. The whalebone of commerce is found in the mouth, in long flat slabs, about ten inches wide where they join the skull, and from eight to ten feet long, tapering to a point at the end. These slabs are set very close together something like the slats of a venetian blind, and hang perpendicularly downwards from the roof of the mouth which is completely filled with them, the whole quantity in a large

RIGHT WHALING.—CUTTING IN THE WHALEBONE.

whale sometimes amounting to nearly two tons in weight. The inner edges are fringed with a sort of coarse hair which acts as a trap and catches the tiny fish it feeds on. The creature swims along with open jaws, and as the water flows through, the little fish become entangled in the fringe. And here again one is struck with the whale's apparent disregard of the fitness of things. A star fish feeds on another fish so near his own size that he can hardly swallow it. A whale eats a minute red shrimp not half an inch long.

Sperm whales are armed with teeth, and have no bone in their mouths, but they yield the best of oil, and are found in tropical waters. It is in the jaws of the "right" whale that whalebone is found, and they abound chiefly in Polar seas, hence the fact that the Arctic Ocean is the great cruising ground today. The curious substance called ambergris which is used in the manufacture of fine perfumery, comes from the intestines of diseased sperm whales, and is supposed to be the result

of indigestion. It is very rare and valuable, and sells for three hundred dollars a pound.

In the palmy days of whaling, when voyages often lasted four years, and no submarine telegraph brought news from home to distant lands, each whaleship when she went out, carried letters and messages to fathers and husbands far away, in case their ship should be spoken, and when two whalers met on the high seas, they would lay to, sometimes for hours, the crews exchanging visits and letters, comparing adventures and having a rare old gossip together. A "gam," as they call it. Gam means gossip. One can well imagine the joy of these chance meetings—and the sorrow too—if some poor fellow heard of the death of wife or child, as must occasionally have happened. Now and then the Captain took his wife with him on one of these long voyages, and New Bedford women thought nothing of going round Cape Horn or up to the Arctic Ocean.

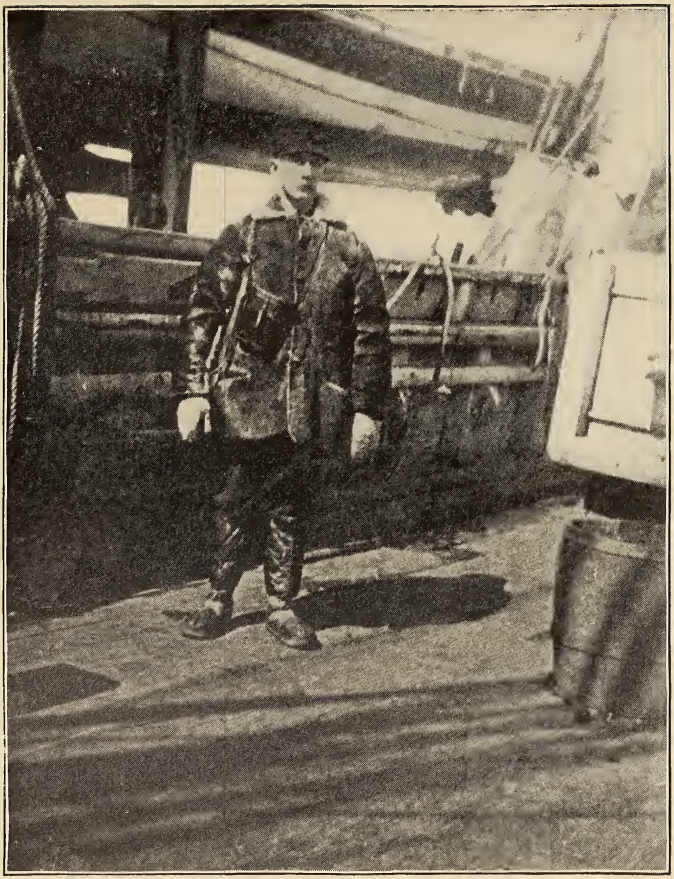
CLEANING WHALEBONE ON A WHALER.

Whalers and whaling have not stood still any more than the rest of the world, and although the life I have been trying to describe still exists, and quaint whaling barks still sail from New Bedford, the live industry has been transferred from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast, and enterprising San Francisco is now its chief port, where big steam whalers are fitted out for the Arctic Ocean. The first steam whaler was built for Capt. William Lewis, of New Bedford, in 1879. She was called the "Mary and Helen" after the two daughters of one of her principal owners, and sent to San Francisco the following year for Arctic whaling. About that time came the news of the loss of De Long — the Arctic explorer — and the Government bought the "Mary and Helen" for a hundred thousand dollars, changed her name to the "Rogers" and sent her in search of that dauntless and ill-fated officer.

A steam whaler arrived in San Francisco some time ago from

a cruise of nearly three years in the Arctic Ocean, where she took sixty-nine whales. The voyage was a most profitable one, and the owners of the vessel expect to clear about one hundred thousand dollars. Each seaman's lay amounts to a thousand dollars or more, it is thought. She brought about one hundred thousand pounds of whalebone. The record of her trip shows that the whaleman's life is as full of danger and adventure today as it ever was. One of her crew was frozen to death while hunting, and the sailor who accompanied him had both feet so badly frost bitten that they had to be amputated. The operation was successfully performed by the Captain of another whaler, who offered his services as an amateur surgeon, and did his best with the few crude instruments at hand.

New Bedford has long ago invested the spoils of her old whalers in big cotton and yarn mills, and become a prosperous manufacturing city, but now and then one comes across a suggestion of the days



A CAPTAIN IN HIS ARCTIC OUTFIT.

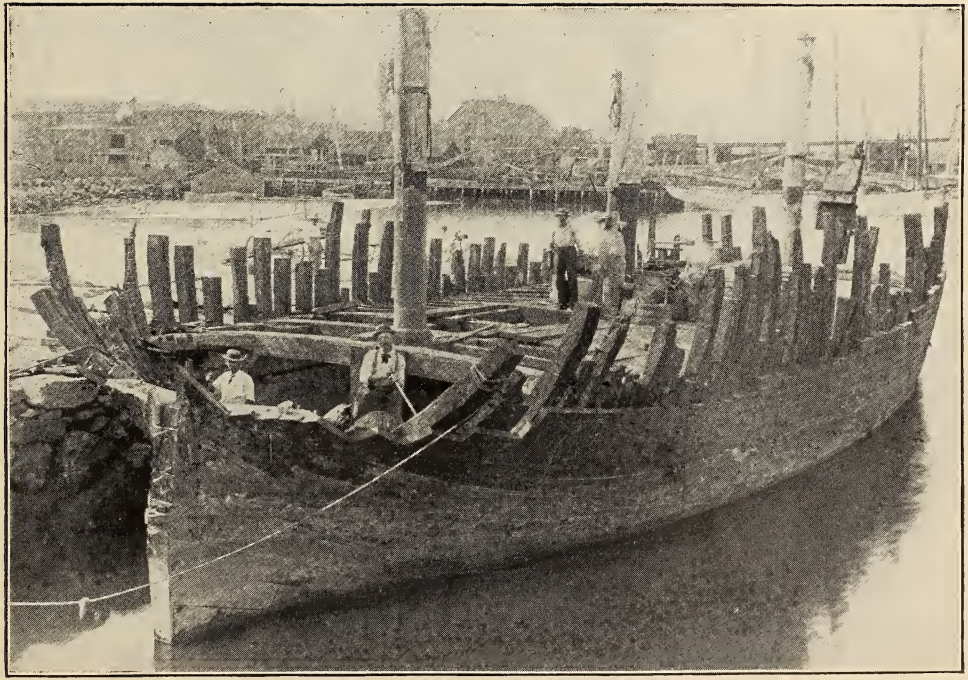
when she was the greatest whaling port in the world, and her male population — as somebody has cleverly put it — "was divided into three classes. Those who were away on a voyage, those who were just returning from one and those who were preparing to start on one." Many of the oldest houses still have the Cupola on top where the owner used to ascend, spy glass in hand to look out for an expected ship, and some have a most curious device for telling which way the wind blows without going outside to see. A round dial marked with the points of the compass, and with a movable hand like a clock, is fixed to one of the ceilings and connected with the weathercock in such a way as to register its every variation. How characteristic of an old sailor to feel that he *must* know the direction of the wind the minute he opens his eyes in the morning.

Much of all this is a twice told tale. Must be, from the very interest of the subject. But I have ventured to hope that the details

which so fascinated the writer (whose ideas of whaling were of the vaguest description) may find here and there an equally uninformed and interested reader.

[NOTE.—I owe the information and illustrations for this article to the kindness of New Bedford ship owners.]

WHALESHIP "YOUNG PHOENIX" BESET IN THE ICE.



BREAKING UP AN OLD WHALESHIP.

Many of the illustrations used in this book are reproduced from large pictures of Whaling scenes of which we make a specialty in our Picture Department.

We can supply these framed in Live Oak taken from old Whaleships if desired.

We have recently purchased a number of curious Old Log Books, giving graphic accounts of Whaling Voyages, which we offer for sale.

We are often able to supply the early prints of the famous Whaling Pictures of Benj. Russell.

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